

Rat kiley in the things they carried

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



You are introduced to many characters throughout the story who deal with their own personal struggles and internal conflicts. From heavy substance abuse to moral convictions about the war and the meaning of why they're fighting, every soldier is unique in their own struggle on the inside. However, there is one character who sticks out to the audience and his name is Rat Kiley.

Rat seems like a pretty normal person compared to the rest of the characters until he witnesses a life changing event altering his sanity indefinitely. He witnesses his best friend Curt Lemon die and this sparks a change in him, a change for the worst. Soldiers that witness gruesome and tragic moments of loss during the war are mentally affected beyond point of repair.

Rat starts off in the book as a normal man who has good morals and helps people. His duty is a medic, so he courageously saves others' lives to the best of his ability. He even goes as far as to carry around M&Ms for especially bad wounds (O'Brien). Rat's story can be summed up to this quote from a literary analysis, *The Vietnam War is so bad that even a kind-hearted, level-headed platoon medic named Rat Kiley eventually succumbs to the stress of war, after his best friend Curt Lemon is blown up into pieces onto a tree by a rigged 105 mm artillery shell. After mercilessly torturing and killing a baby buffalo with his rifle and seeing many more body bags, Rat Kiley finally mutilates himself to get out of war, " " This whole war," (Noor-Tehrani).*

Curt Lemon's death is what began Rat's downward spiral out of control.

Witnessing your best friend being killed will obviously shake anyone up, however it is different with Rat Kiley because he gives the biggest reaction.

This event produces the question, why was Rat the only one who couldn't deal with Curt's death or at least keep his sanity after his death. Everyone had dealt with a loss but what makes Rat so special? Why did Rat literally go insane because of it? He was Curt's best friend, and this may have been why it had the biggest impact. He was also the medic, so possibly he repeatedly wondered why he couldn't save his best friend. These thoughts going on in his head over and over would certainly make someone go insane. The thought of not being able to do your job and save your best friend would have a lasting, indefinite impact on anyone and this is a key point as to why Rat went so crazy.

After his death, Rat decided to write Curt's sister opening himself up to her in a letter. This eventually did not go as planned because days and months passed by with no response from the sister. This left distaste in Rats mouth as he just explained to her how his Brother in Arms was killed and how much he meant to him. Rat even ends up bawling in the process of writing this letter because of how heavy the subject is for him (O'Brien 64).

Soon enough Rat snapped, he began doing very odd things. Later in the book he ends up mercilessly killing a water buffalo, he shoots it once and then continues to shoot it over and over again for no apparent, logical reason. The killing of the water buffalo represents something for rat, the animal represents innocence and then is brutally destroyed. This part in the novel symbolizes Rats innocence being destroyed, it is a very important part in the book representing the timeline of Rats internal struggle. In the book O'Brien states that A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor

encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing things men have always done. (O'Brien 65). Nothing about Rats story is moral at all, he is an example of a man's innocence being tainted.

Rat eventually decides he gets to his full limit and ends up shooting himself in the foot to leave Vietnam. This shows just how much of a toll the Vietnam war can take on a man and the lengths he will go to in order to leave that hell. This is an example of Rat being unable to cope with his best friend's death and the pressures that war puts on you. It shows that a sane man can be turned insane, it shows that a normal man can be changed indefinitely, and it shows how easy it is to lose your innocence and humanity in a time of war, even for level headed people.

This book in a whole highlight the struggles of Vietnam veterans and why they are so different from other generations. A large portion of these soldiers are shown the worst of the worst throughout the war and it makes such a large impact on them for not just the duration of the war but for the rest of their life. The things they see are unimaginable and incredibly violent which will forever take a toll on their lives, and the things they experience are spiritually draining and damaging, and the things they carry are unbelievably heavy both physically and mentally. Rat Kiley was a man of good will and good morals and would of never been thought of as to turn crazy and be affected the way he was from the war but he was. Soldiers lose their innocence and humanity in war because of what they see. They lose their innocence because of what they go through and they lose their humanity

because of the things they do during the war. They lose their sanity because of the things they carry with them for the rest of their life.